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ABSTRACT

A survey of students in the school of economics in an Italian university investigated the following: (1) students' attitudes toward and interest in learning English as a second language; (2) their perceived need for using the language personally, academically, and professionally; (3) their assessment of their own second language proficiency; and (4) their opinions about the most important second language skills to develop and the most useful classroom activities. A random sample of 200 students at all levels of English language proficiency and in all four program years was surveyed. A parallel questionnaire was administered to non-language-teaching staff actively involved in the business world and in the teaching profession, asking about their perceptions of students' present and future English language needs, their own academic and professional uses of English, and their perceived need for English language skills improvement. Analysis of the results focused on predicting learner success, the relationship of social interaction and language learning, the perceived primacy of oral skills, and issues related to specialized terminology. Sample teacher and student questionnaires are appended. (Author/MSE)

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ED304006

LINDA LOMBARDO

LANGUAGE LEARNERS' NEEDS, INTERESTS AND MOTIVATION:

A SURVEY OF EFL STUDENTS IN AN ITALIAN ECONOMICS FACULTY

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LINDA LOMBARDO

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Tutti i diritti riservati a norma di legge
e delle convenzioni internazionali

To my parents, Eugenia and Joseph

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INTRODUCTION

This text will report on the results of a survey taken toward the end of the 1984-85 academic year in the Faculty of Economics of the Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali (LUISS) in Rome, Italy. A questionnaire was designed to elicit as much information as possible about students' attitudes toward and interest in learning English, their perceived need for using the language personally, academically and professionally, their assessment of their own linguistic competence and their opinions as to which skills were most important for them to develop and the kinds of classroom activities they considered most useful to them. This questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 200 students at all levels of language proficiency across the four years of the program. At the same time a parallel questionnaire was given to the non-language teaching staff, professors of Economics and Business for the most part, many of whom were actively involved in the business world in addition to their university teaching. They were asked to give information about what they saw as students' present and future English language needs as well as information about their own academic and professional uses of English and an indication of the area(s) in which they would like to improve their own English language skills, if any. The results showed some striking similarities between students' and professors' responses and some interesting differences. Before describing the study in detail, I will first give some background on the areas of research in foreign language learning which had a direct bearing on the way in which the questionnaires were formulated and interpreted.

1. BACKROUND

1.1. Needs analysis

During the 1970s experts working within the Council of Europe began to focus on defining the linguistic needs of various groups of foreign language learners within the European Community, e.g. immigrants, business people, university students, etc. They wanted to establish realistic learning objectives for different levels of competence on the basis of the uses learners were expected to make of the foreign languages they were studying, in so far as these uses were predictable. Teaching priorities could then be set according to learning objectives and final use (see Van Ek and Alexander 1977 and Van Ek 1975). On the basis of these studies, syllabi were eventually drawn up and didactic materials developed (see Wilkins 1976 and Trim 1978). It was also the heyday of languages for special purposes, such as the English needed by bank personnel, medical doctors or engineering students. And soon this approach was extended to groups whose future needs were less clear-cut but whose immediate interests could be tapped, for example, secondary school students.

There was a parallel focus on the individual situations of learners: their entry level competence, their motivation, the number of hours they could be expected to devote to language study, in what setting, with what regularity, etc. The attempt to make a match between individual language learners and the linguistic demands that were likely to be made on them necessitated a certain amount of collaboration with learners. And, indeed, they were asked about their language learning needs, interests and problems (see Richterich and Chancerel 1977 and Richterich 1983). The fact that many of them were adults already working or seeking a specific kind of employment made it easier to obtain reliable information. But even in a school setting, younger learners had ideas about what they needed or wanted to use a foreign language for. And, as Widdowson (1979) points out, the expression "learner needs" can refer not only to what learners need to do with the language once they have learned it, but also to what they need to do in order to actually acquire the language. In all cases, it was found that the more learners were consulted in decision-making as to the kinds of things they should be learning to do in a foreign language and the more they were involved in evaluating their own linguistic progress and in determining which problem areas they needed to work on most, the more active and motivated they became and the better they learned (see Altman 1982). Moreover, there was a growing awareness that if learners could take on greater responsibility for their own learning — learning to identify

problems, adopt appropriate strategies to deal with them, consult available sources of help and develop criteria for functioning in the foreign language — they would be able to continue learning on their own outside the classroom and without the assistance of a teacher (see Oskarsson 1978 and Holec 1980).

1.2. Learner attitudes and motivation

In Canada and the United States there was a similar interest in predicting learners' needs and organizing teaching syllabi which spelled out the various language behaviors learners might be expected to engage in, particularly with reference to newly arrived immigrant groups and foreign students studying at Canadian and American universities. But the way in which learners' goals affect their learning of another language was also being examined in these two countries from another perspective, namely, the extent to which the individual learner wants to integrate with the target language group. From studies of the French and English total immersion programs in Canadian schools, Gardner and Lambert (1972) developed their theory of instrumental and integrative motivation, which said that people who wanted to learn a language for utilitarian reasons, e.g. to pass an examination, to travel in another country or to get ahead in their occupations, would not learn it as well as those who were genuinely interested in associating with native speakers of that language, open to their culture and desirous of eventually being accepted as a member of that group. Others (see Graham 1978 for a review of the literature) went even further and said that identifying with and wanting to belong to the peer group in question after a prolonged experience of direct contact — and here the term «assimilative motivation» was adopted — was the primary impetus for developing native-like speech in a second language. Likewise, the central premise of Schumann's (1978) acculturation model, which seeks to explain how a second language is learned naturally, i.e. without formal instruction, is that the learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he or she integrates socially and psychologically with the target language group.

However, some later studies contradicted Gardner and Lambert's findings (see Oller, Hudson and Lieu 1977 and Gardner 1985 for a fuller discussion), showing that a strong instrumental motive was sometimes more highly correlated with achievement than an integrative motive, particularly in a foreign language setting. They stressed that learning a foreign language is not the same as learning a second language, where the target language

community is physically present in the surrounding environment, and that the foreign language classroom, where the members of the peer group are not native speakers of the target language, is in many ways a very different context from a natural second language learning situation, so that what is valid for one is not necessarily valid for the other. In fact, it was found that learning a more prestigious or a more practically useful language outside the country where it is spoken was frequently associated with instrumental motivation. The conclusion was that the type of motivation that is most effective for learning another language depends on the particular situation in which the language is learned and on how that situation is perceived by the individual learner (Snow and Shapira 1985).

These studies suggest that the relationship between attitudes and language proficiency, though important, may be a complex, indirect one (Chihara and Oller 1978), or even a reciprocal one (Upshur, Acton, Arthur and Guiora 1978). For example, the very experience of learning another language may affect learners' values and personalities in either a positive or a negative way. There is some evidence that learners may develop more positive attitudes as they gain in proficiency so that their ability to learn becomes a major factor in shaping their attitudes toward a language (Oller and Perkins 1978). And learners may have a favourable attitude toward language learning in general, the target language in question and their particular learning situation, regardless of how they view native speakers of that language.

Rivers (1983) asserts that where students do not feel threatened and where the activities they are asked to engage in seem meaningful to them, they will be naturally motivated to learn. She suggests that students may be motivated to learn English but not interested in learning it the way the teacher wants them to. She points out that acquiring a second language does not depend on any particular content but rather on using "language for the normal purposes of language" (p. 152). That is, if students are saying things intended to be understood and writing things intended to be read by someone who is interested in what they have to say, they will be involved in the new language and much more likely to make it a part of their own repertoire. This kind of teaching approach means finding out something about students' real interests and preoccupations, from the activities in which they engage on their own, their reading habits and the experiences they have had, to their lives as students, as members of their local communities and citizens of their countries, the content of their other courses and their career plans. It also implies that students' contributions are welcomed and given serious consideration in a way that increases their self-esteem and the respect with which they are viewed by their fellow

students. In River's words, "in a program where students are actively learning in a real-life context and actively engaged in using what they are learning in ways they recognize as worthwhile, the question of motivation becomes academic" (p. 154).

1.3. Learning strategies and learner autonomy

This concern with the individual learner is reflected in another major thrust in language learning research in the 1970's and 80's, namely, the interest in what learners do in order to learn a new language. There is growing recognition that learning is selective and that exposure to appropriate language data is often not sufficient for "input" to become "intake"; that is, learners do not necessarily "learn" language they come into contact with (even though it may be within their ability to comprehend and thus to learn from), but rather those parts of it which they perceive as meaningful to them and worth assimilating (see Larsen-Freeman 1982).

Furthermore, much research seems to indicate that people can learn in different ways and that, in fact, individuals often have learning preferences (see Hartnett 1985 for a review). Some approach new information analytically and proceed in a linear, sequential fashion while others are holistic and synthetic, learning and recalling information as a whole; some code information better verbally while others use imaging to code visually and spatially, etc. The thinking and problem-solving mode an individual has developed a preference for will influence the way in which he or she learns a new language. Analytic language learners, for example, are thought to prefer deductive methods, i.e. working from the rule to examples, while holistic language learners are thought to prefer inductive reasoning, i.e. discovering the rule from examples. Some language learners can learn from verbal explanations while others need to associate a new word with an image. Some language learners are reflective, slower and more accurate, while others are impulsive and more fluent. It is sometimes suggested that learners be allowed to choose the language course, that is, the teacher and the teaching methodology, that is most compatibile with their own learning styles. More often it is felt that since both modes exist in every individual, all learners should be taught to use the two learning styles, e.g. through an alternation of inductive and deductive presentation of new material, frequent use of audiovisual aids which stimulate all the senses, etc. (see Hosenfeld 1975).

If it is true that people learn differently, it is also true that some people learn languages better than others, which probably means they are able to exploit their learning potential more fully in this task. From learner

introspection and the observation of more successful language learners, three different kinds of strategies have been identified which contribute directly or indirectly to language learning (see Rubin 1985): learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. Learning strategies can be cognitive, that is, those that center directly on the language to be learned, or metacognitive, that is, those that focus on and monitor the learning process. Rubin (1981) described six general cognitive learning strategies which seem to aid language learning: clarifying/verifying new information; guessing/inferencing on the basis of previous knowledge; reasoning deductively or looking for and using general rules which help to organize the discrete elements of the new language into an ordered system; practicing or trying out new material while focusing on accuracy of usage; developing memory techniques (such as, association or grouping) to facilitate storage and retrieval of new information; monitoring errors or self-correction, which appears to be a combination of cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Metacognitive strategies involve knowledge about cognition, or awareness of how one learns, and regulation of cognition, the planning, monitoring and evaluating of one's learning activities (see Wenden 1985). LeBlanc and Painchaud (1985) claim that self-assessment measures can be a valuable placement tool in situations where students have nothing to gain from being less than truthful. Thus learners can assess their needs and preferences and choose what they want to learn about a language and how they should learn it, both in terms of their own theories about how language is learned and in terms of the resources they think they can use.

Communication strategies are used to enable a speaker to continue participating in a conversation when she or he is having difficulty getting meaning across or understanding what the other speaker intended. As such, they allow the speaker to remain in a situation where language learning may take place. In the same way, social strategies create an opportunity for practice in the language by providing the learner with exposure to the language, e.g. by inviting social interaction with native speakers.

This kind of research views the learning process as including both explicit and implicit knowledge. It is believed that for some learners for some tasks, conscious attention to the learning process is the first step in making language automatic. And making learners aware of their learning strategies may enable them to redirect them, making them more productive. It becomes part of the teacher's role then to help students to identify learning strategies and to decide which ones work best for them. Various ways have been used to focus language learners on their own learning, from questionnaires and interviews to "thinking aloud" protocols and the keeping of daily progress journals. Studies suggest that adult learners do know a

great deal about what they believe and what they do in learning another language (see Wenden 1986) and that the ability to learn is educable, that is, it can be improved through training (see Bialystok and Frohlich 1978). Rubin and Thompson (1982) have written a manual for second language learners to use on their own. Growing learner autonomy is thus equated with greater learning success.

This brings us full circle back to where we began, with our focus on the learner for needs analysis. As we have seen, needs can be extrinsic and practical, but they can also be intrinsic and affective. And motivation can be long-term and connected with real-life situations or immediate and related to involvement in the here and now of the language classroom. Furthermore, students who have some awareness of how they learn best are more likely to elicit appropriate language samples and to take an active part in assimilating more and more of the target language. Likewise, the more teachers know about their students, their attitudes and their language learning strategies, the better they can assist them in their task. It is in this spirit then, as consciousness-raising for both teaching staff and students, that this project was undertaken. Hopefully, it will also make some small contribution to the body of data collected by others over the past few years.

2. THE SURVEY

2.1 The language program at LUISS

Foreign language study is required as part of the students' academic preparation. In the Faculty of Economics all students study English for 4 years and a second foreign language (French, German or Spanish) for 3 years. Attendance at class is compulsory and regular work outside the classroom, e.g. reading and doing written assignments, is expected. A standard test (the Michigan Placement Test) is administered when students enter the program on the basis of which they are divided into homogeneous groups of approximately 25 students each. These groups generally go from real beginners at the bottom to advanced at the top with a wide range of intermediate-level groups in the middle. All groups meet for 3 hours a week except for the real beginners' group, which has 6 hours of class a week in the first year and 4 hours a week in the other 3 years, and the second lowest group (typically, false beginners), which has 4 hours of class a week for 4 years.

Teaching programs are geared toward the students' level of linguistic competence and attempt to cater to the needs and interests of the specific group of learners. Didactic materials are generally selected and/or developed by the teachers in accordance with the learning objectives set for that group. Tests are written by the course teacher for the purpose of evaluating progress and reflect as far as possible the focus and activities that were characteristic of that particular course. In this way, those who entered the program with no previous study of English are not discouraged by unfair comparison with those who find themselves from the very beginning in the top groups, and even the most advanced students are given an opportunity and an incentive to improve their language skills. Students are followed closely and their progress is evaluated on the basis of a number of factors: class participation, written work, written midterm and final tests, and a final oral examination at the end of each course.

By and large, students are highly motivated, both because they recognize the importance of a good knowledge of English for their studies and their future careers and because they usually have a favorable attitude toward and an interest in trends and styles coming from English-speaking countries, in economics and journalism, in sportswear, rock music and cinema. Furthermore, limited group size and the flexibility of the syllabus make it easier to set up classroom activities which challenge and engage them. Students are typically encouraged to interact with peers and the language teacher and to take the initiative in helping to shape their lessons. Work

is done on all 4 skills (speaking, understanding, reading and writing) with an emphasis on using the language effectively, as opposed to studying about it. As early as possible, students are introduced to economics and business related reading texts and a systematic effort is made to assist lower-level students in developing effective reading strategies for dealing with authentic texts (e.g. from textbooks, newspapers, magazines) on such topics. It is felt that stimulating students to apply the concepts and analytical skills they are learning in other courses to text interpretation and discussion in English and giving them the experience of learning something in the foreign language which is useful to them as university students and future professionals can be a powerful incentive to learning.

One of the features of fourth year classes is the opportunity for students to prepare and deliver an oral report and/or write a short paper on a topic of interest to them. In this way, students determine some of the content of the course, and work on grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary can often be based directly on students' errors in a context of real language use where they are likely to be motivated to improve on what they themselves have produced. Written tests are based on what students have done during the course so that they tend to reenforce the learning that goes on in class. Oral examinations usually take the form of a discussion between examining teachers and a student or students on a subject of the student's choice which she or he feels knowledgeable about. There is a wide variety of materials available for use by the teachers, including a reference library and materials file, British and American newspapers and periodicals (with the use of a photocopy machine), audio-cassettes for use with portable tape recorders and, in the last 2 years, video equipment and a video cassette library and a limited amount of computer software.

2.2. The questionnaire

In the academic year 1984-85, the long-planned project of a needs analysis was revived and carried out. The idea behind the project was to collect information from both students and their content professors about their opinions and experiences related to the use and the learning of English: the students as current users of the Language Department's services and the professors both as academics and as experts actively involved in various job situations in the field of economics and business. I expanded the two questionnaires originally developed together with colleagues Frances Eubanks, Cora Hahn, and Maria Sticchi-Damiani. The new version of the students' questionnaire included not only questions to provide a profile

of the respondants, including their foreign language background, and information related to their current and future English needs and interests, but others which it was hoped would give some indication of their attitude toward English and their motivation to learn it. Where possible, parallel questions were set up on the professors' questionnaire so that comparisons could eventually be made between their responses and those of the students.

2.3. The procedure

Towards the end of the academic year in question, 1984-85, I selected 200 students (out of a total of 1165 attending English courses regularly) randomly from each class, in proportion to the total number of students in the group and the male-female ratio. I took these students to a separate room and asked them to fill in the questionnaire, which took about half an hour. I explained the reason for the survey to them and assisted them with occasional problems in interpreting the meaning of a question or the form of an answer. They were told not to write their names on the questionnaires. They tended to follow instructions carefully and most responded to all questions.

At the same time, I sent out the other version of the questionnaire to all members of the (non-language) teaching staff with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and asking for their collaboration. I did a follow-up when some of the professors teaching key courses failed to respond by mail and conducted several interviews to obtain the necessary information. These face-to-face encounters proved invaluable in eliciting additional information and in verifying the way in which certain of the items on the questionnaire had been interpreted. Out of a total of 68 professors, 51 questionnaires were completed (one anonymously).

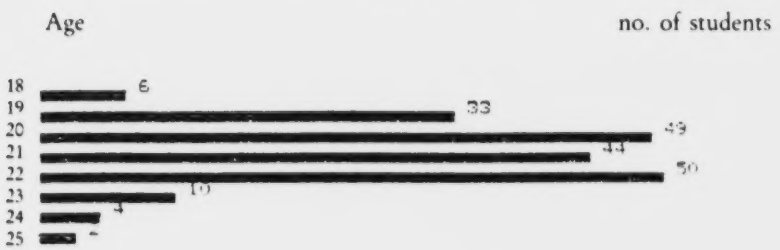
3. RESULTS

3.1. Student profiles

Questions 1 to 13 of the Students' Questionnaire provide a profile of the respondents: age, sex, nationality, residence, type of secondary school attended, previous study of English, knowledge of other modern languages, year of study at LUISS, the English course they are currently attending and, for fourth year students, the specialization ("indirizzo") they have chosen.

As expected, the students who answered the questionnaire were between the ages of 18 and 25, with the majority (88.9%) between the ages of 19 and 22.

GRAPH 1



Reflecting the male-female ratio in the total student body during that academic year, respondants were 77.5% men and 22.5% women. With the exception of one student (non English-speaking), all the respondants were of Italian nationality. The breakdown by region was the following:

TABLE 1
Residence of Students

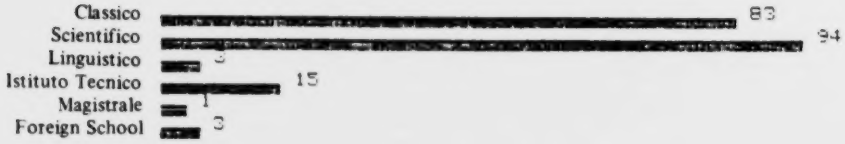
Region	no. of students	% of total
Northern Italy	3	1.5
Central Italy	167	83.5
Southern and Insular	28	14.0
[No Reply]	[2]	[1.0]

(Included in Northern Italy were: Piemonte-Val d'Aosta, Lombardia, Liguria, Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Emilia-Romagna; in Cen-

tral Italy: Marche, Toscana, Lazio, Umbria and Abruzzo; in Southern Italy and the Islands: Campania, Molise, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, Sicilia and Sardegna.)

The overwhelming majority of the students who responded came from a Liceo Classico (41.7%) or a Liceo Scientifico (47.2%):

GRAPH 2



Only 10 students reported having attended non-Italian schools in the past and only 4 of these were English-language schools. (Of the remaining 6 schools, 5 were French and 1 German.) Three of these students had studied for approximately 1 year in an American high school while 1 had attended elementary school in South Africa for 3 years.

A whopping 93.5% had studied English before beginning the University. Most of them (86.5%) had taken it at school, for an average of 6 years and 2 months; some (25%) had studied it privately in Italy, for an average of 2 years and 8 months; and some (34.5%) had studied it abroad for an average of 6 1/2 months.

Seventy-five point five percent answered that they had studied or knew French, Spanish or German. If this percentage seems high, it can be explained by the fact that while only some had studied one or more of these languages prior to University, the second, third and fourth year students were all currently enrolled in a second foreign language course. Table 2 shows the percentage of students who rated their competence in one or more of these languages as acceptable, good or very good. Notice that while the students who felt they had a satisfactory grasp of French accounted for only 27.5% of all the students surveyed, they represented 54.5% of those who reported having studied it or learned it in some other way. Similarly, 11% of all students and 55% of those with some background in Spanish

considered themselves competent in the language and 8% of all studerts and slightly less than half of those who had studied it (48.5%) in German. It must be remembered that these numbers include first year students, who have not yet begun the study of a second language at the University, and second year students, who are only completing the first year of a 3-year program.

TABLE 2
Students Who Reported Competence in Another Foreign Language

Language	% of total	% of valid replies
French	27.5	54.5
German	8.0	48.5
Spanish	11.0	55.0

Table 3 shows the distribution of students by level of English. For the purposes of the survey, groups 1 to 4 were considered relatively lower levels (although even these students have reached at least a solid intermediate level of proficiency by the third or fourth year of study); groups 5 to 8, intermediate to upper intermediate; and groups 9 to 12 (or 13), advanced. At the time of the survey the number of groups in each year varied slightly with 11 in the first year, 12 in the second and third years and 13 in the fourth year.

TABLE 3
English Level of Students

	no. of students	% of total
Lower	62	31.0
Intermediate	71	35.5
Advanced	67	33.5

The labeling of groups as equivalent to a certain level of language proficiency is probably too arbitrary. If one considers that the number of groups in any single year depended on the total number of students attending classes in that year, that students who began the program with little or no English were given a higher number of class hours per week, that students who made normal progress remained in the same group as they moved from one year to the next, and that more students tended to come from secon-

dary school at intermediate levels than at advanced levels or as real beginners, it becomes obvious that any objective description of linguistic competence on the basis of group assignment is extremely difficult, particularly after students have been in the program for a year or two. This lack of strict correspondance between group number and linguistic competence and between students in the same group in different years of the program may account, at least in part, for the failure to find significant correlations between students' answers to certain of the questions and their group levels in the English program.

The breakdown by year of study at the university was the following:

TABLE 4
Students by Year of Study

	no. of students	% of total
1st year	45	22.5
2nd year	58	29.0
3rd year	47	23.5
4th year	50	25.0

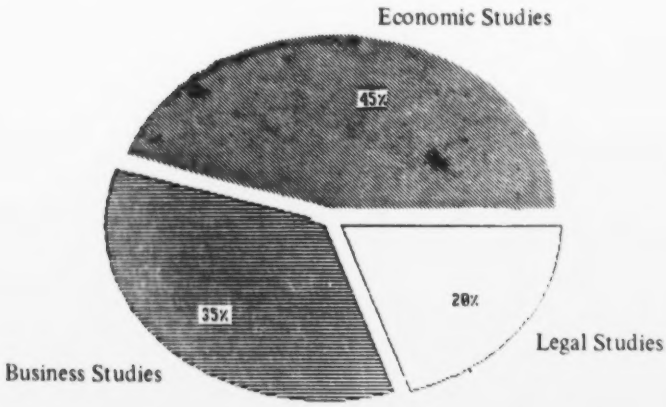
The specializations ("indirizzi") given by fourth year student respondants were the following 7 (out of a possible 11): esperto di organizzazione aziendale, analista di marketing, analista economico-gestionale, finanza aziendale, esperta di amministrazione societaria e fiscale, economista finanziario, and economista generale.

3.2 Professor profiles

Respondants to the Professors' Questionnaire were asked to give their names and the titles(s) of the course(s) they were teaching that year. This information and the answers to the first 2 questions show the extent to which the questionnaire tapped the (non-language) teaching staff. Out of a total number of 68 professors teaching that year in the Faculty of Economics, 51 questionnaires were completed (1 anonymously): 23 professors belonged to the Istituto di Studi economici, 18 to the Istituto di Studi aziendali and 10 to the Istituto di Studi giuridici (Question 1). Twenty-two of them taught required courses in the first, second or third years, 22 of them taught basic courses in the fourth year and 7 of them taught elective courses in the fourth year (Question 2).

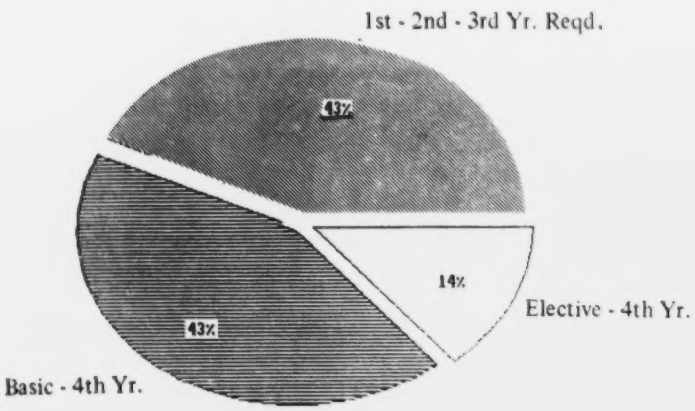
GRAPH 3

Respondents by Department (Professors)



GRAPH 4

Courses Included in Questionnaire



3.3. Students' academic, professional and personal English needs

In the first, second and third years, where most of the courses were compulsory, there were 2 professors teaching the same subject, each one

to approximately half the students. In the fourth year, there were 3 required courses and 2 electives for each of the 11 possible areas of specialization; several courses were included in more than one area. Also, some professors taught more than one course in more than one year. Table 5 shows the number of courses and professors included in the survey in relation to the total number in each of the 4 years, as well as the number of courses where reading in English was required or suggested.

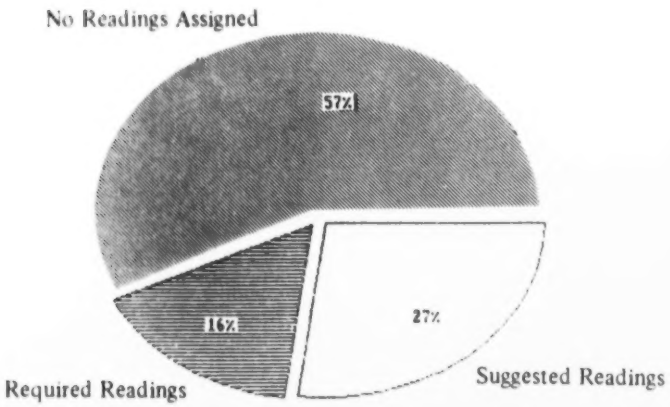
TABLE 5
Information Included in Professors' Questionnaire by Course Year

Course Year	Total No. of Reqd. Courses	No. Reqd. Courses Included	Total No. Elective Courses	No. Elec. Courses Included	Total No. Professors	No. Prof. Included	Assigned Readings in English
I	6	5	—	—	12	6	1
II	6	5	5	3	17	11	4
III	7	7	—	—	14	12	6
IV	24	23	20	7	45	31	13

The only 2 required courses in the first and second years not included in the questionnaire were "Storia moderna" (taught by 2 Political Science professors) and "Storia economica". In the third year, all courses were included in the questionnaire and in the fourth year, 23 out of 24 required courses were included. (In addition, the only anonymous questionnaire involved a required course in the fourth year.) As expected, the greatest need for reading in English was in the third and fourth years: in the third year half of the 12 professors who responded wanted their students to read in English, for 6 different subjects, while reading in English was required or suggested in 13 fourth year courses. Readings in English were more likely to be suggested than required in the third year (1 required to 5 suggested), while the opposite was true in the fourth year (7 required or required and suggested to 6 suggested). This seems reasonable in light of the greater specialization in the fourth year, which could mean that a source of information in English rather than being supplementary is the only one available (Questions 3-8). In one course, an elective in the fourth year, only texts and articles in English were used.

GRAPH 5

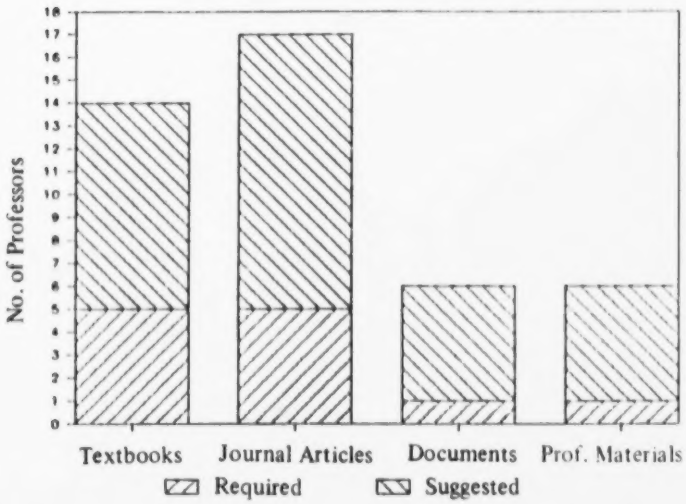
Professors Assigning Readings in English



Specialized books and journal articles and texbooks predominated as the types of reading material students were asked to deal with most frequently.

GRAPH 6

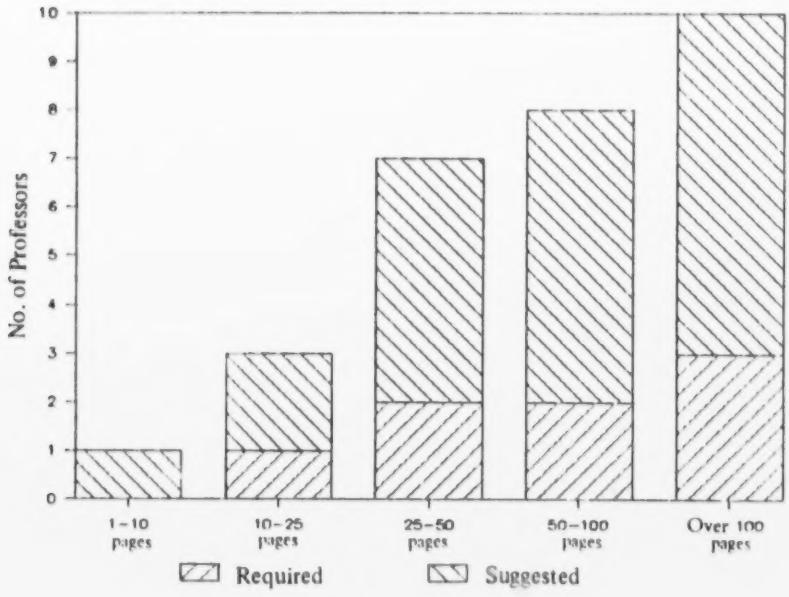
Type of Reading Materials Assigned



Graph 7 gives an idea of the number of pages students were typically expected be able to read in English. The fact that 10 professors suggested or required readings of over 100 pages and another 7 assigned readings of between 50 and 100 pages means that students who had to or chose to comply needed to be able to read extensively in the foreign language.

GRAPH 7

Quantity of Reading Materials Assigned



Students' answers to parallel questions (Questions 25-26) gave results that were much less clear. First of all, the amount of reading in English assigned in the various courses was under-represented (13 courses were cited in all: 1 in the first year, 1 in the second year, 4 in the third year, and 7 in the fourth year); secondly, the number of pages reported tended to vary significantly from student to student for the same course and often students failed to indicate the type of text and/or its approximate length. The limited number of fourth year students included in the survey (50) may account in part for the lower numbers, that and the fact that where students were unable to recall specific information, they either had to guess

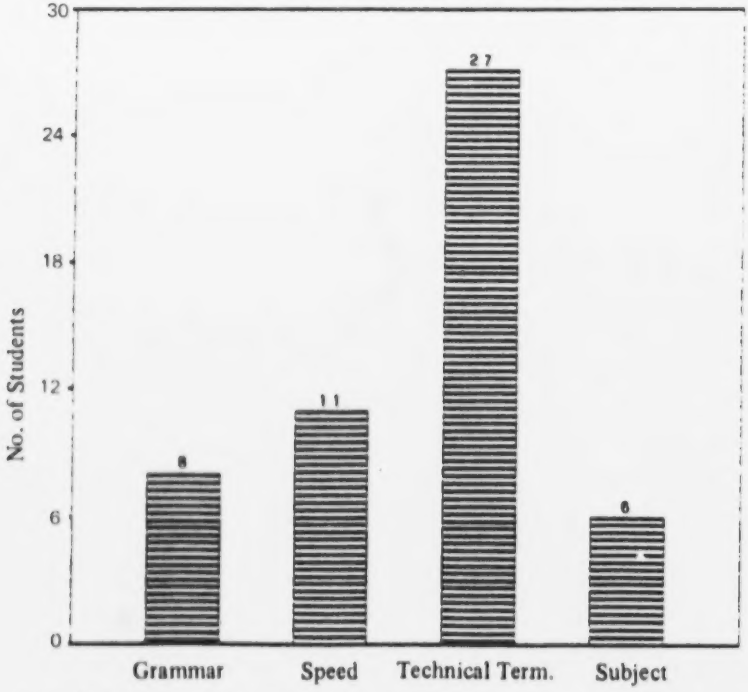
or give an incomplete answer. For this reason, the professors' responses will be treated as definitive.

The majority of students (66.5%) said knowledge of English was useful in following other courses at the University (Question 23), this in spite of the fact that only 48.5% of them were in their third or fourth years, where most of the reading assignments in English were given. In fact only 24% of students said they had to read in English that year for other courses (Question 24). This is probably because for some students, suggested readings were not given the same weight as required readings and also because, particularly in the fourth year, the need to read in English was closely related to the courses students had chosen to follow as part of their specialization.

When asked to indicate problems they encountered frequently reading these texts, the students in question responded as follows (Question 27):

GRAPH 8

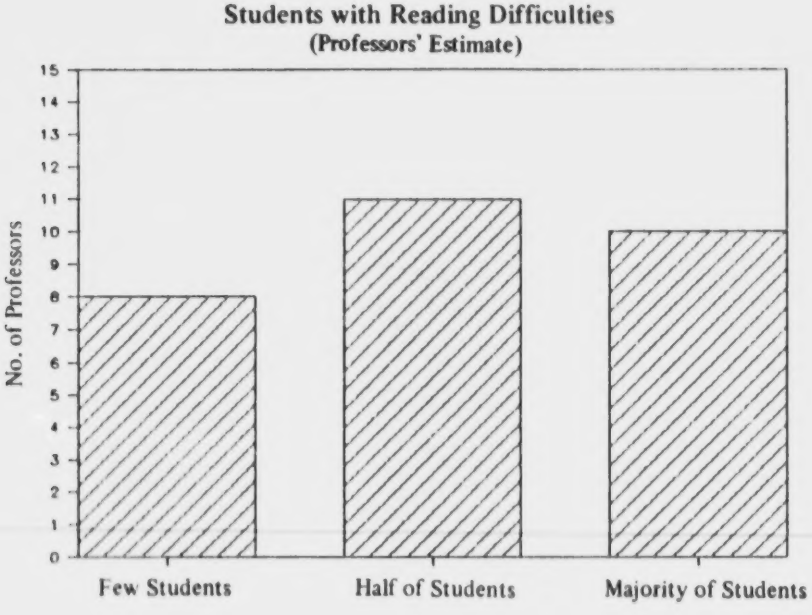
Source of Greatest Difficulty in Reading



Graph 9 shows the number of students professors thought had serious problems reading materials in English, either to follow one of these

professors' courses or to write a thesis in their areas of specialization (Question10):

GRAPH 9



The students' view of technical terminology as the greatest source of problems for them in reading in English was shared by the professors, who, however, felt that lack of ability to read rapidly was a bigger problem than students did (Question 11). [See Graph 10 on the next page.]

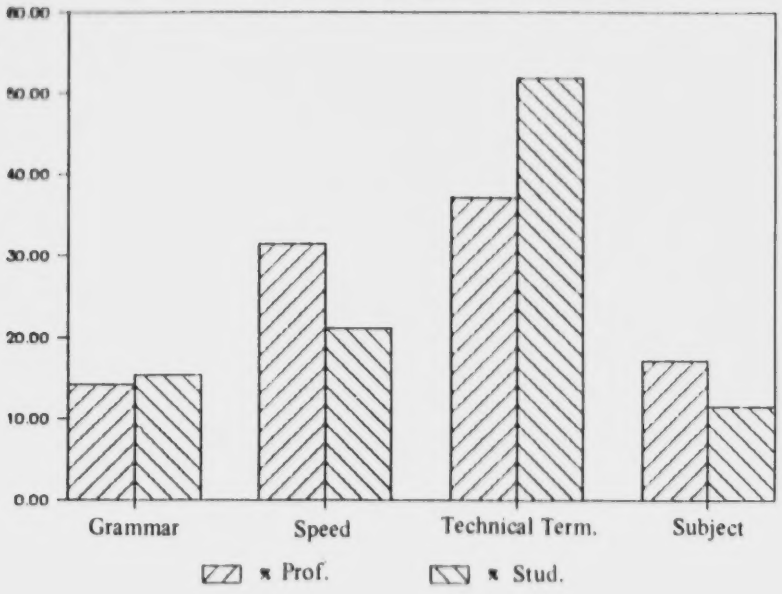
One professor indicated that he felt it was, objectively speaking, very difficult to read specialized academic texts rapidly in English without a good deal of experience. He also said that the particular kind of reading and the prerequisites for understanding it varied from specialization to specialization.

While professors said that when selecting a text for students to read they took into consideration clarity of style and conceptual density (Question 12), in talks with several of them it became clear that most often texts in English were assigned because equivalent texts in Italian were not available. And the fact that professors were aware that one text might be

GRAPH 10

Source of Greatest Difficulty in Reading

Professors' Estimate vs. Students' Affirmations

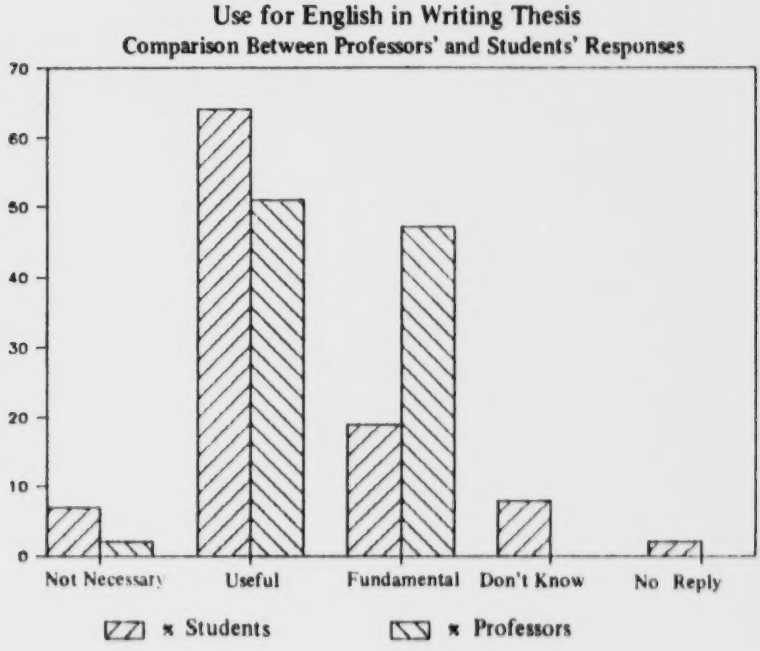


written more clearly and its language more transparent than another did not usually mean that they were actually able to choose one text over another on this basis.

Eighty-three percent of the students said that a knowledge of English was useful or indispensable for writing a good thesis (Question 28). All but one of the professors responding said that reading in English was useful or indispensable for writing a thesis in their area of specialization (Question 9). [See Graph 11 on the next page.]

Of the 16 students who had started working on their thesis, 9 said that they had to read in English and of these 9, 3 reported that they were having considerable difficulty (Questions 29-31). Unfortunately, the numbers here are so low that they are impossible to interpret. This is because many students would begin work on their thesis only after having finished all their courses, and so after the time when this survey was taken. Reading was obviously the most called for skill related to coursework at the University. Only 5 professors indicated that they asked students to listen to guest speakers in English as part of their courses (Question 13).

GRAPH 11



When students were asked to indicate those professional activities for which they felt the use of English would be indispensable (Question 34), they rated these highest: understanding oral reports (140 students), participating in conferences and meetings (111 students), presenting oral reports (109 students), reading professional materials (108 students), and socializing (103 students). Their assumption that they would need to be able to function at a high level of English was evident in the response one student wrote in: "essere padroni della lingua" (to master the language). Other write-in answers were: informal conversation, traveling/living/working abroad, and understanding radio and relevision.

When professors were asked the same question (Question 14), many of them rated the following indispensable: understanding oral reports (30 professors), reading specialized books and journal articles (28 professors), reading textbooks (25 professors), and reading professional materials (25 professors). Then came reading official documets (23 professors) and particpating at conferences and meetings (20 professors). (One professor stressed the importance of being able to read the English and American press

and said he had read about Ronald Reagan's new economic program in an English-language newspaper and in *Newsweek*.)

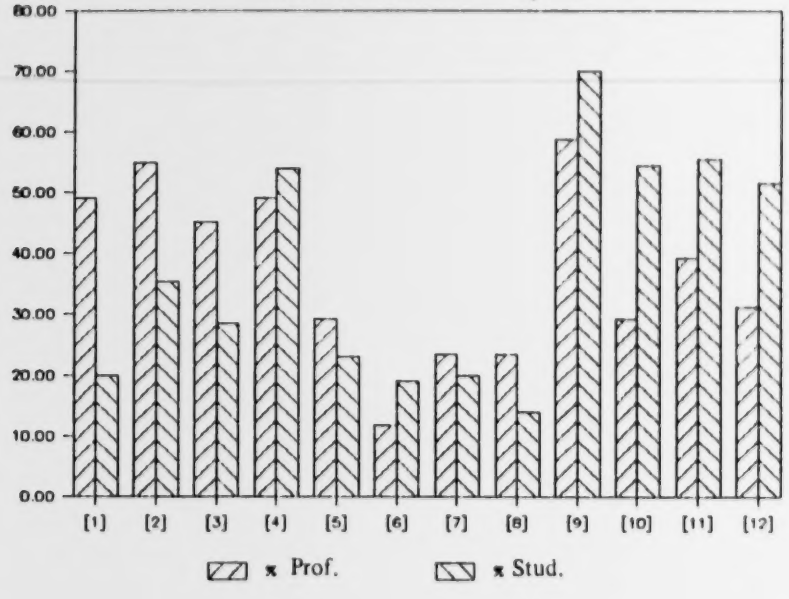
TABLE 6
English Fundamental for Professional Activities
Professors' vs. Students' Responses

	Prof.	Stud.	% Prof.	% Stud.
[01] Reading Textbooks	25	40	49.02	20.01
[02] Reading Spec. Books and Journals	28	71	54.90	35.51
[03] Reading Official Documents	23	57	45.10	28.51
[04] Reading Professional Materials	25	108	49.02	54.01
[05] Reading Newspapers/Periodicals	15	46	29.41	23.01
[06] Translating into Italian	6	38	11.76	19.01
[07] Writing Business Letters	12	40	23.53	20.01
[08] Writing Reports	12	28	23.53	14.01
[09] Understanding Oral Reports	30	140	58.82	70.01
[10] Presenting Oral Reports	15	109	29.41	54.51
[11] Participating at Meetings	20	111	39.22	55.51
[12] Socializing	16	103	31.37	51.51

GRAPH 12

English Fundamental for Professional Activities

Professors' vs. Students' Responses



Two activities were emphasized by students and professors alike, understanding oral reports and reading professional materials. Professors gave greater importance to reading, which was involved in 4 out of 5 of the activities they ranked highest. This may be due in part to the fact that although they worked professionally outside the University, their positions as university professors also made it imperative for them to keep up in their fields through typically academic kinds of reading. In fact, students also valued reading highly, but mainly that which they saw as most closely connected with their future jobs[1]. Three out of 5 of the actvities ranked highest by students involved proficiency in speaking. However, understanding the spoken language, the single most important activity for both students and professors, implies a good knowledge of the spoken language. And professors too recognized the usefulness of being able to participate at meetings, which requires the use of sophisticated oral skills.

The preference given by professors to the so-called passive skills, understanding the spoken language and reading, was reflected in their answers to Questions 16, 17 and 18. They said that English was, predictably, the foreign language they used most frequently in their academic or professional lives, followed by French, German and Spanish. [See Graph 13 on the next page.]

And the most frequent use they made of their English professionally was in reading, followed by understanding and then speaking and, finally, writing. [See Graph 14 on the next page.]

When asked if they planned to require that students use English more in their courses during the next academic year, 24 out of 50 professors responded in the affirmative (Question 20). As Table 7 on page 36 shows, these professors were most interested in asking their students to read more in English, particularly specialized books and journals, but students would also be asked to read other kinds of materials and, in one case, to listen to lectures in English. (A few professors indicated that they would assign more reading and invite outside speakers if they felt sure that all students could cope well with that level of English.)

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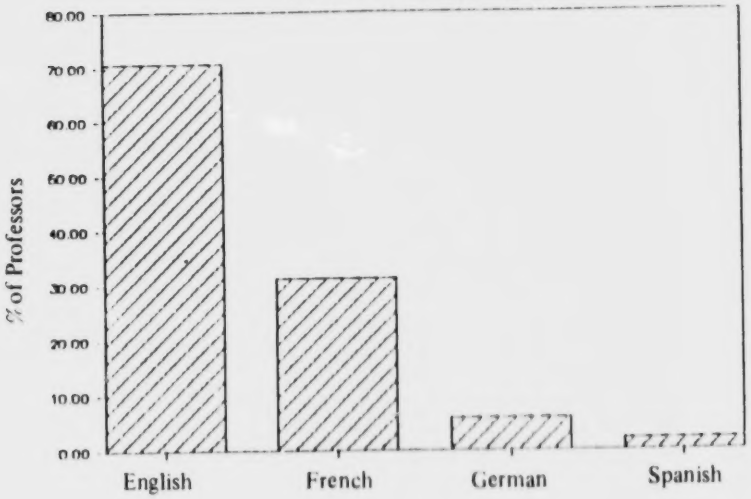
[1] Several professors pointed out either on the questionnaire or in interviews with the researcher that the need for English on the job depended very much on the kind of work it was, e.g. if it involved contacts with companies and/or countries which were either English-speaking or did business in English, and, in some cases, on the level at which the person was operating so that it tended to be more important for professionals working in higher positions than for those in lower positions.

GRAPH 13

Frequent Professional Use of a Foreign Language

(Professors' Responses)



GRAPH 14

Frequent Professional Use of English

(Professors' Responses)

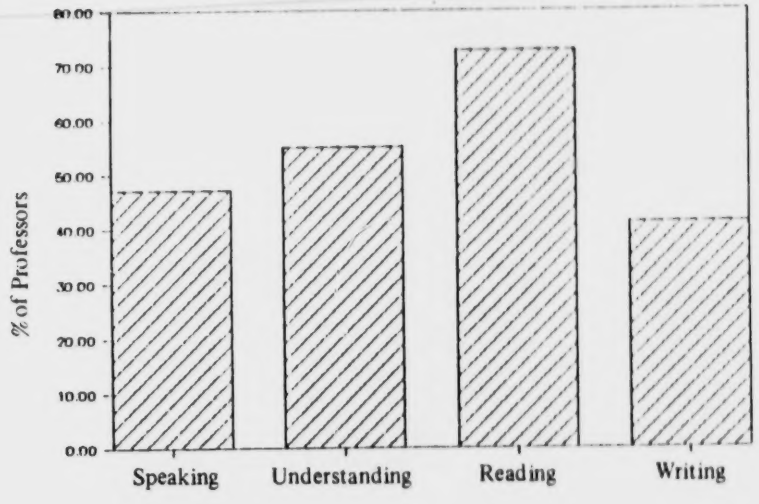


TABLE 7
Professors' Planned Increase in the Use of English for Courses

Activity	no. of Professors
Reading Textbooks	5
Reading Specialized Books and Journals	18
Reading Official Documents	3
Reading Professional Materials	8
Listening to Lectures	8
Reading Newspapers and Periodicals (*Financial Times, The Economist*, etc.)	1
Participating at Seminars	1

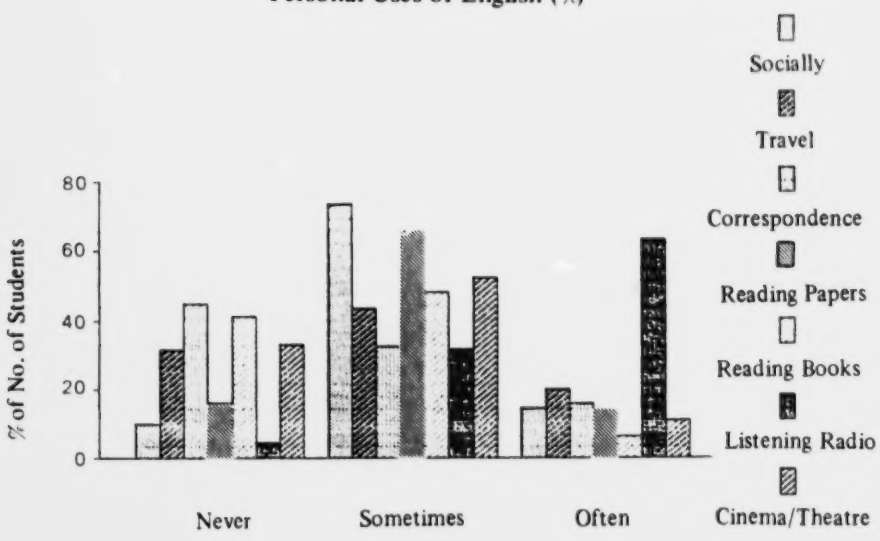
When students were asked about what kinds of activities they used English for in their personal lives (Question 32), the most frequent uses they reported were the following. One hundred and twenty-six (63%) said they often used English to listen to the radio or to records and tapes, while another 63 (31.5%) said they sometimes did. In addition to 29 students (14.5%) who said they often used English socially, 147 (73.5%) said they sometimes did. Twenty-eight (14%) said they often read newspapers and magazines while another 131 (65.5%) said they sometimes did. (More students would probably have said they used English when they traveled if the question had not specified "in English-speaking countries".)

TABLE 8
Personal Uses of English
(Students' Responses)

		No.	%
[1]	Socializing	176	88.0
[2]	Travel in English-Speaking Countries	127	63.5
[3]	Correspondence	97	48.5
[4]	Reading Newspapers and Magazines	159	75.5
[5]	Reading Books	109	54.5
[6]	Listening to Radio/Records/Cassettes	189	94.5
[7]	Cinema/Theatre	126	63.0

It seems clear from the picture that is presented that students' personal use of English was not at all relegated to the written word on the page but involved all four skills, from listening and speaking through reading and, to a much lesser extent, writing. This also was in keeping with their

GRAPH 15

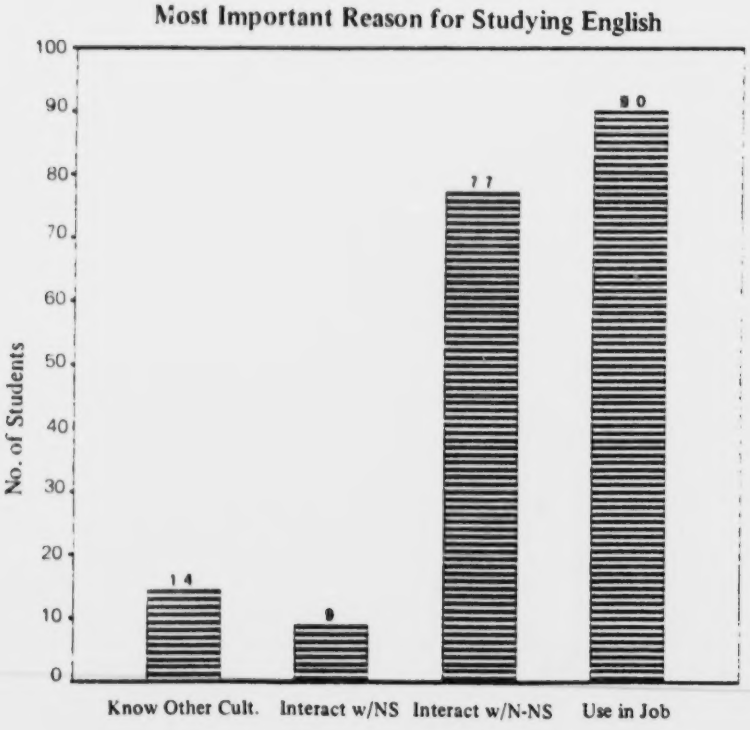


responses to the question about the kinds of things they thought they would use English for professionally. They tended to view language competence as a much more global skill than did their professors and saw themselves as actively engaged in a variety of activities in English, some of them involving productive oral skills.

3.4. Students' motivation, interests and language learning preferences

The main reasons students gave for wanting to know English were to use in their jobs and to interact with non-native speakers (Question 15). [See Graph 16 on the next page.]
This response is not surprising, given the predominant role of English today as a lingua franca and its growing importance in the European Economic Community as a vehicle of communication, not only between Italians and British people, but also between Italians and Germans, Italians and Greeks, Italians and French people, etc. And with the elimination of trade barriers

GRAPH 16



among Common Market countries by 1992, there will be more and more opportunities for working in or with other member countries.

Even though students felt that being able to interact with native speakers of English was a relatively unimportant reason for learning English, 60.5% of them said they had already visited an English-speaking country (Question 16). Of the 79 students who answered no, virtually all of them said they would like to visit an English-speaking country sometime in the future (Question 17). (Since 82 students responded in the affirmative, evidently, 3 of the students who said yes to the previous question answered this one too although they were not asked to do so.) This would seem to indicate a generally positive attitude toward the language and the people who speak it, whether for strictly utilitarian reasons or out of a personal interest and affective openness to them.

For some students this positive attitude had a more specific, concrete dimension. They were among the 32% of all students who indicated that

they planned to live for a period of time in an English-speaking country after they graduated, either studying or working (Questions 38-39).

The vast majority of students said that they would have chosen to study English at LUISS even if it were not compulsory (Question 14):

TABLE 9
Would Take English Though Not Compulsory

	No. of Students	% of total
Yes	192	96.0
No	7	3.5
[No Reply]	1	.5

When asked if they had followed English courses outside the university since they began the English program at LUISS (Questions 18 and 19), 14 students responded in the affirmative: 6 of them had studied in Italy for 1 year on the average; 8 of them had studied abroad for periods of 1 to 3 months; and 1 of them had studied both in Italy and abroad. No one reported having followed university-level courses in the field of economics and business in English outside the LUISS (Question 20). More than a lack of interest these results are probably due to the full-time commitment typical of LUISS students, who attend classes regularly and tend to complete all of their examinations during 4 years of study. They have little or no time for outside study and are already enrolled in a fairly extensive language program as part of the curriculum.

In response to the question asking them to evaluate their own proficiency in English, students answered in the following way:

TABLE 10
Students' Assessment of Their Own English

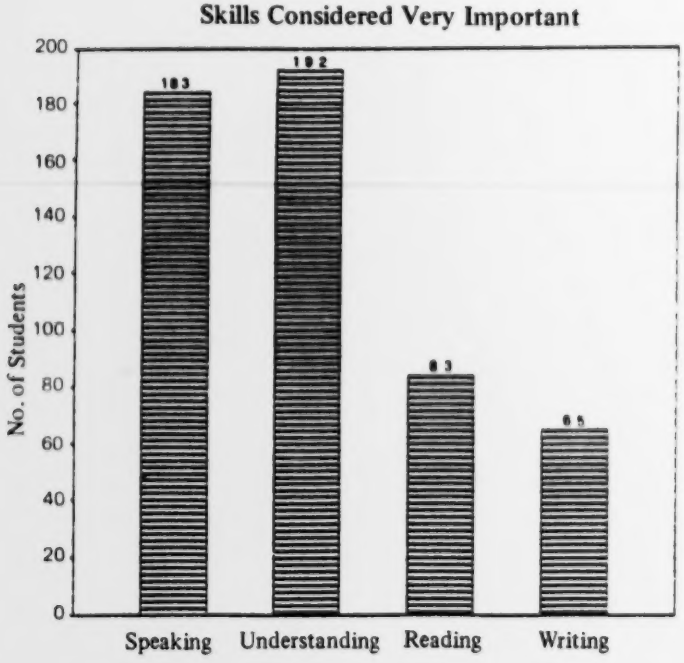
Skill	Poor	Acceptable to Very Good
Speaking	35 (17.5%)	164 (82%)
Understanding	13 (6.5%)	186 (93%)
Reading	37 (18.5%)	162 (81%)
Writing	115 (57.5%)	80 (40%)

These results are interesting for several reasons. First, they lend support to other research findings which indicate that learners are indeed able to recognize their own competence in the foreign language at a given point in time. In this case, the students studying at upper levels of proficiency consistently evaluated their ability to speak, understand and read in English

higher than those at lower levels did. (The majority of all students rated themselves low on their ability to write in English.) And students' assessment that they could understand other speakers slightly better than they were able to speak themselves is in keeping with much of the research in first and second language acquisition which shows that learners often know more language than they can produce. Secondly, when these results were compared with what students said were the most important skills to acquire and with what they would most like to improve in (see below), it became clear that, regardless of how they viewed their own ability, the most important things for them were knowing how to speak and being able to understand other speakers.

In response to the question about which of the 4 skills they felt were most important to acquire (Question 21), 93.8% of students said that speaking was very important, 99.5% understanding, 43% reading and only 33.5% writing. (No one rated ability to speak or understand as irrelevant, 2% rated reading irrelevant and 14.9% writing.) This graph gives a clearer picture of student responses:

GRAPH 17

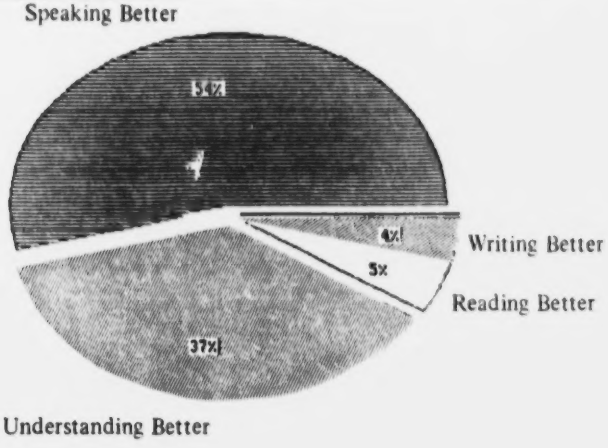


The importance students gave to being able to communicate orally reflects the immediacy of today's world (some say we are in the age of a new orality) and the common sense opinion that knowing a language is equivalent to being able to understand and speak it. Reading ability, while useful, is not normally viewed as the real test of language competence; and in fact it is common knowledge in the field of English for Special Purposes that experts with even a rudimentary knowledge of English grammar are often able to read quite accurately in their areas of competence, where they are familiar with most of the concepts discussed and with the formal organization of such texts and where terminology is normally limited and repetitive. Being able to write in a language which is not one's own tends to be considered less essential, pragmatically speaking, and a more sophisticated and secondary use of language. Also, studying at an Italian university, these students had no real need to write in English outside the language class. Students' responses were consistent across levels and seemed to reflect the attitude of the student who entered the program at an advanced level as well as the one who came with no English at all.

When asked in which of the 4 skills they would most like to improve (Question 33), students responded as shown in the graph below:

GRAPH 18

Most Desirable Reason For Improvement (Students)



These results are consistent with students' answers to Question 21, where they rate developing oral skills the most highly. What they seem to want most for themselves is the ability to communicate well in the spoken language, which also involves being able to understand others when they speak. And since producing language is often more complicated than interpreting it and they rated themselves higher on their ability to understand, it seems reasonable for them to want to work more on speaking better. It is interesting to note that although none of the students who responded rated themselves as good writers in English (see responses to Question 37), all but a very few gave learning to write a low priority as though being able to write well in a foreign language were something of a luxury and/or too difficult to achieve. It should be mentioned here that the pattern of student responses to this question remained the same across levels, so that students who were studying at the so-called advanced levels, where it might be supposed there would be more interest in working on writing skills, indicated the same preferences as those studying at the so-called lower levels. Their limited interest in improving their reading skills may be due partly to the fact that many of them felt relatively competent in this area (81%) and partly to a belief that they could always find a way to deal with a written text on their own but that what they really needed assistance with was what they had little opportunity to practice in a non-English speaking country, namely, listening and speaking.

If we take a look at the professors' responses to a similar question (Question 19), we find the same interest in the spoken language but in this case the desire to improve their ability to understand others is slightly greater than their desire to improve their own ability to speak. (Of the 7 professors who either did not answer this question or said they had no desire to improve their English, 3 said it was because they were already quite proficient.) This may reflect a real need the professors have in attending conferences and conventions at a European or international level where the English language tends to predominate. It is not surprising that only 2 professors expressed a strong desire to improve their reading skills; obviously, those with a need to read in English for their work were already up to the task. Professors were slightly more interested in improving their ability to write, most likely because of a specific professional use for this skill, either in business or in their academic roles. [See Graph 19 on the next page.]

When students were asked to indicate what they felt were the classroom activities which were essential for their learning the language (Question 36), they answered as shown in Table 11 on the next page.

GRAPH 19

Most Desirable Reason for Improvement (Professors)

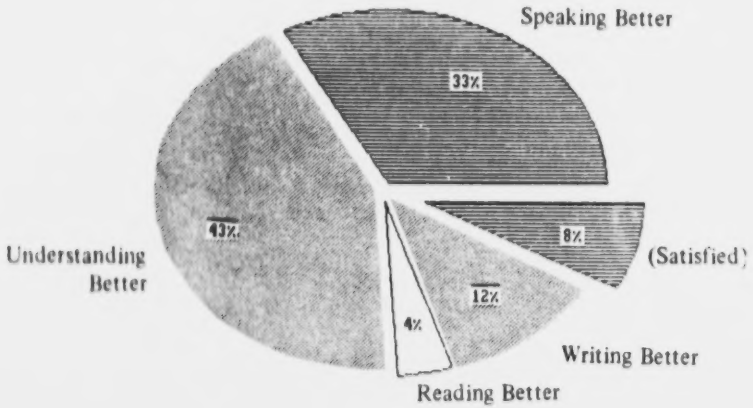
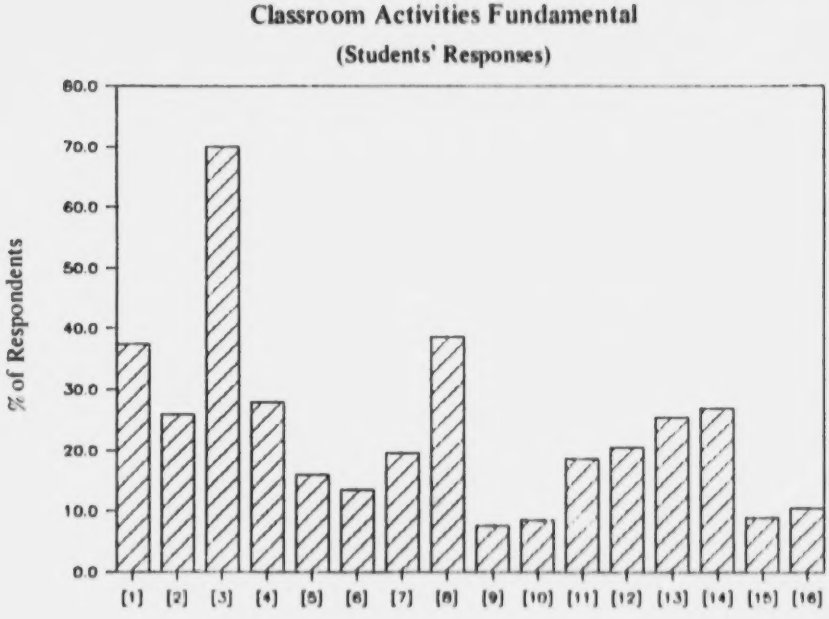


TABLE 11
Classroom Activities Fundamental
(Students' Responses)

	No.	%
[01] Listening to Tapes	75	37.5
[02] Pronunciation Exercises	52	26.0
[03] Conversation/Discussion	140	70.0
[04] Oral Reports	56	28.0
[05] Oral Grammar Exercises	32	16.0
[06] Written Grammar Exercises	27	13.5
[07] General Reading	39	19.5
[08] Economics Reading	77	38.5
[09] Analyzing Words	15	7.5
[10] Translating into Italian	17	8.5
[11] Translating into English	37	18.5
[12] Writing Letters/Compositions	41	20.5
[13] Writing Business Letters	51	25.5
[14] Writing Business Reports	54	27.0
[15] Writing Term Papers	18	9.0
[16] Quizzes and Tests	21	10.5

GRAPH 20



Conversation/discussion on various subjects was thus seen as the single most helpful classroom learning activity (140 out of 200 students said it was fundamental). This is understandable in light of the fact that many of those who had previously studied the language at school but had difficulty in using it in any real, spontaneous way were probably aware when they entered the LUISS program that they needed to approach the study of English differently, that is, not from the aspect of grammar rules and rote learning of new vocabulary but by using it in contexts that were meaningful to them; they may also have realized, consciously or unconsciously, that studying dialogues and passages in a language text which did not relate directly to their own experience too often did not result in assimilation so that it would not prepare them to function in real-life situations where they became protagonists. This is certainly in keeping with research findings that a personal, natural use of language for some type of real communication may be the best way for learners to learn that language (see discussion section). Students were probably also aware that conversing/discussing in the classroom was not the same as conversing/discussing outside (although it might be a rehearsal for it) as they could take advan-

tage of the language teacher's presence to solicit needed input, monitor their performance, etc.

It is easy to imagine that the input or stimulus for conversation/discussion often came from what students heard or read about in the English course. In fact, the other 2 classroom activities most frequently mentioned as fundamental were listening to recordings (75 students) and reading texts related to economics and business (77 students). This is a further demonstration of students' interest in working on oral skills in a natural, communicative way and in using English in connection with their studies and with their future jobs.

None of the listed classroom activities were considered unimportant for learning the language by the majority of students. The following are responses which students wrote in: simulating problems encountered in English-speaking countries, talking with native speaker experts on economics and business, using a language laboratory.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Predicting learner success

It was hoped that the students' questionnaire would provide some information about the differences between students who entered the program at lower and intermediate levels and those who came in advanced. While many students with 5 years of English at school were placed in the first year in Group 2, the second lowest group, others went directly to Group 5 or even higher; and while 8 years at school in addition to approximately 2 years of private study and/or 1 to 2 months in the summer studying in Britain or the United States was not infrequent for students at advanced levels, Groups 9 to 12, it was not uncommon for students at middle levels either, Groups 5 to 8; and at the same time, some of the most advanced students had only studied English at school, usually for 8 years, which was also true of some of the students at lower or intermediate levels, for example, Groups 3 to 5. Obviously, the quality of foreign language teaching depends to a large extent on the school and the teacher. But, as we have seen, the motivation and the learning strategies of the individual learner are of paramount importance. For example, everyone has known people who have spent time studying abroad in a target language setting who seem to have picked up very little of the language, while other people seem to absorb whatever language they are exposed to, apparently effortlessly, even from the most unlikely sources, without ever leaving their own country.

In the LUISS setting, some of the students who enter the program as real beginners prove to be excellent language learners, make outstanding progress, and leave the program with a good basis in the language and the criteria, the strategies and the confidence they need to continue learning on their own. On the other hand, it sometimes happens that students who enter the program at a low level of proficiency in spite of several years of previous study prove to be poor learners with low motivation whose ability to use the language is much inferior to that of even an average real beginner after one or two years in the program. This might be due in some cases to a negative language learning experience in school, which may have convinced these students that they could not learn English and fixed in their minds certain errors and mistaken notions about the language which then have to be unlearned, so that they actually begin their English studies at the university with a handicap. And they may have developed bad language learning habits in the past that actually prevent them from learning.

Chiavetta (1985) reports on a study of Italian high school students in Palermo which found that students' initially favorable attitude toward learning English changed dramatically from the first to the fifth year, apparently as a result of their experience in school; the majority thought they had achieved a very low level of linguistic competence and indicated that they no longer wanted to study English. The reasons the researcher gives are a failure to consult students about what it was they were interested in learning and a lack of teacher motivation.

It is interesting to note that on this questionnaire the majority of the LUISS students surveyed (81% to 93%) gave themselves at least an acceptable rating on 3 out of the 4 skills (speaking, understanding and reading) and on both of the skills students as a whole considered most important to acquire (speaking and understanding). This finding would seem to indicate that students tended to feel satisfied with the progress they had made in the program and were not discouraged about their ability to learn English.

4.2. Social interaction and language learning

Students rated conversation/discussion very high as a classroom learning activity. They also considered oral skills of primary importance in their personal and professional uses of the language and the area where they most wished to improve. Their common sense feeling that what they really needed was practice in a situation simulating the use they wanted to make of the language in real life, namely, talking to other people, coincides with what research has to say about the importance of output and the role of social interaction in learning another language. Swain (1983) claims that output, that is, producing language, fulfills a vital role in the process of acquiring another language since it enables the leaner to experiment with the structures of the target language, whereas, in the decoding of input, meaning can be derived from a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic cues without necessarily focusing on structure. Some researchers (see Housen and Beardsmore 1987) suggest "...it is not input per se that is important to second language acquisition, but input that occurs in interaction where meaning is negotiated." (p. 89) Pica (1985) points out that the restructuring of interaction to achieve mutual understanding that is considered such a powerful factor in second language development requires a two-way flow of communication: learners and their interlocutors need and desire to understand each other and both feel free to request clarification or confirmation of the other's input or to check on the comprehensibility of their own production. The kind of relationship this implies is

not characteristic of teacher-student interaction, where participants have been assigned unequal status.

A number of experts have recognized the importance of peers as the speaker models preferred by language leaners (see Dulay and Burt 1977). Moffett (1980) asserts that the communicative context is distorted in classrooms where students relate only to the English teacher and emphasizes that interaction should take place between communicants who are equal and whose roles are reversible. In his view students can practice being speakers and listeners with better motivation and in a way that more closely resembles how they speak and listen outside of the classroom by relating to the class group, which he calls "the nearest thing to a contemporary world-at-large" (p. 12). Of course, the fact that the members of the peer group in this case are not native speakers of the language means that they can benefit greatly from the language teacher's contribution in preparing them for discussion, providing input as needed during the discussion, and following up on problem areas afterwards. But the fact that students are communicating something meaningful to them to a group of their peers in the foreign language can only have a positive effect on learning.

4.3. The primacy of oral skills

The differences between the students' and the professors' responses on this questionnaire as to the importance of the various language skills could be compared with the findings of similar studies elsewhere. A faculty survey taken at an American university (see Johns 1981) showed that professors considered listening and reading skills more essential to non-native speaker success in university classes than speaking and writing skills. In another study of foreign university students in the United States (Ostler 1980), it was found that advanced ESL students were not as satisfied with their conversational skills in social and academic settings as their teachers had expected them to be. Because the use of oral skills outside the narrow realm of concrete, routine transactions involves the creative construction of language and is highly unpredictable, learners tend to feel insecure about their ability to cope. At the same time, they are extremely motivated to be able to succeed since these encounters are important to them, both practically and affectively. The results of a needs analysis carried out at the University of Rome (Nuccorini 1980) showed that EFL students in the Faculty of Political Science were more interested in General Purpose English than in English connected with their other courses or with their jobs and that oral communication was more important to them than reading and

writing. In another survey of University of Rome students from various faculties (excluding Economics and Business) who were studying a foreign language in the Centro Tecnologie linguistiche in the Faculty of Economics (Resta 1981), 85% said knowledge of the spoken language was the main objective of their studies, while 41% (mostly from the Science Faculties) said they wanted to acquire technical or scientific language, and only 13% limited their goal to being able to read in the foreign language. A study of ESL students at a university in the United States (Christison and Krahnke 1986), showed that while students recognized the importance of the receptive skills of reading and listening in academic work, they felt that natural communication with native speakers in and out of the classroom was the most valuable means of learning the language and 70% of them expressed a wish to add more speaking to the language program; they ranked reading the easiest skill and writing the one they used most infrequently. It seems obvious then that many students' interest in learning a language is not limited to narrow, specialized uses and that, no matter what their immediate academic needs may be, their overriding concern is with being able to use the language for normal purposes of communication.

In the LUISS survey, professors gave more empasis to reading in English professionally than students did. More of them said that reading in English was essential for doing a thesis. They also thought students had more trouble reading for their courses because of an inability to read rapidly than students indicated they had. Predictably, they perceived reading specialized texts to be the students' main academic need for English, although a few of them also mentioned the usefulness of being able to understand speakers. Many of them, however, indicated that, aside from reading and understanding, they also used their ability to speak and write in the language for their work. And, like students, they were most interested in improving their oral skills. Students in this survey were very much interested in developing their language skills for use in their future jobs, However, they felt that as professionals it would be at least as important for them to be able to speak and to understand the spoken language as it would be to read work-related materials[1]. While students expressed less of an interest in im-

[1] It is interesting to note here that in a preliminary study of English needs on the worksite conducted by Maria Sticchi-Damiani and this researcher, 41 recent L.U.I.S.S. graduates employed in a variety of companies ranked the following activities in English as fundamental in their jobs: reading professional materials (27); reading journals (23); understanding oral reports (22); and oral communication, such as participating in discussions, talking on the telephone, etc. (20). Their responses too seem to indictate a need for all four skills.

proving their reading skills, they recognized that specialized terminology was a significant problem for them in reading in English for their regular courses or for their thesis.

4.4. The problem of specialized terminology

The problem which specialized terminology presents in reading in English as a foreign language has been a subject of concern in the field for some time. In word counts of various types of economics texts, it has been found that the most frequently used vocabulary items across texts tend to be those connected with a general academic use of English. The specialized words, on the other hand, vary since they are characteristic of specific fields. And while it would not be impossible to expose students to a variety of texts in different areas, if it is true that most of the reading texts assigned by professors to students attending their courses were chosen beause they were either so recent or so specialized that they were available only in English, it may be quite unrealistic to think that students can be taught the necessary terminology for each one in their language classes[1]. And let us remember that specialized terms often have no real synonyms in the general language and sometimes not even in the student's own language; they usually refer to concepts and analytical frameworks which are not familiar to the person who is not an expert in that particular sector, and may even be culture bound in that they take their meaning from a situation that exists only in the foreign culture.

Perhaps the best preparation for reading that can be given to students with a solid grammatical base in the language is to teach them something about the content, including the most important words that are used to talk about it, and the form the text will take, e.g. description/definition, cause/effect, etc. (see Hudson 1982, Carrell and Eisterheld 1983, and Carrell 1987 about the importance of previous knowledge of the subject matter and text format in EFL reading comprehension). Although language teaching experts can become more knowledgeable about another field, it is highly unlikely that they will ever approach the expertise of the individual

[1] On the contrary, some reading experts [see Krashen 1981] suggest that "narrow reading" or reading a series of texts on the same subject or by the same author will help students to read better and faster in a foreign language because of the natural redundancy and reenforcement of concepts and vocabulary.

who specialized in that field and in that field only to begin with. What the language teacher can do, besides improving general linguistic competence, is to work with students on improving their reading strategies: using the layout of the text and previous knowledge of the subject matter to predict content, inferring meaning from context, consulting the dictionary or other reference sources effectively, developing techniques for retaining new vocabulary, etc.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey can be considered encouraging. In a general cultural context like this one, where attaining proficiency in English is highly valued and where young people in particular tend to be extremely open both to the language and to the people who speak it as their native tongue, there would seem to be ample motivation to stimulate and sustain language learning. If we add to this the fact that most of the students polled in this survey had relatively high expectations of the skill level they wished to achieve, we can consider this an excellent basis from which to work. And while much has been made of the advantages of acquiring a language "naturally" in the country where it is spoken, some recent research (see Breen 1985 and Edmondson 1985) has focused on the features inherent in the classroom situation which may facilitate the learning of a new language: the presence of a group, learners and a teacher, ensuring a wealth of prior knowledge and experience, both of language and of communication, on which to build new knowledge and experience; the possibility of sharing decision-making, which is motivating and which generates authentic communication about getting things done in the here and now; and the opportunity for participants to work through language and on language and to focus explicitly on the language learning process itself.

The research done in connection with this survey also suggests that where language classes focus on doing something that is not in itself highly valued by students, every effort should be made to make them aware of the purpose behind it. For example, in working on writing skills it should be pointed out to students that writing in a foreign language can help them to: reenforce what they have learned by consolidating grammar and vocabulary and fixing output so that it is easier for them to correct their errors; concentrate on and remember the main points of a lecture or textbook (notetaking); clarify their thinking so they can present ideas or information in a more organized, coherent manner, particularly in a formal register; facilitate reading by making them more aware of the process authors go through and of the various forms a written text can take.

Where reading is concerned, especially reading in a specialized register, students should realize that transferring their good reading skills from their native language to the foreign language may be far from automatic when a text is complicated and contains too many unknown words. It can be suggested that they would probably benefit from consciously focusing on the kinds of strategies they can use to compensate for gaps in their linguistic knowledge.

Finally, it is hoped that the sharing of this experience will help to promote a better understanding between students and teaching staff, between language teachers and content teachers and between this language program and other language programs elsewhere.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONARIO STUDENTI

1) Età .....

2) Sesso: 1. F ☐
2. M ☐

3) Nazionalità: 1. italiana ☐
2. altra ☐ .....

4) Residenza (città, provincia) .....

5) Titolo di studio della scuola media superiore:

1. Liceo classico	☐	5. Istituto tecnico	☐
2. Liceo scientifico	☐	6. Istituto magistrale	☐
3. Liceo artistico	☐	7. Istituto professionale	☐
4. Liceo linguistico	☐	8. Scuola non italiana	☐

6) Se ha frequentato una scuola non italiana, indichi:

1. Dove? .....
2. In quali anni? .....
3. In quale lingua? .....

7) Ha studiato inglese prima di iscriversi alla LUISS?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 9)

8) Per quanto tempo ha studiato l'inglese prima di iscriversi alla LUISS?

	1 N. di anni	2 N. di mesi
1. A scuola	.....	.....
2. Privatamente	.....	.....
3. All'estero	.....	.....
4. Altro	.....	.....

9) Ha studiato o conosce altre lingue oltre all'inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

10) Se sì alla domanda precedente, come giudica il suo livello di conoscenza?

	1 scarso	2 discreto	3 buono	4 molto buono
1. Francese	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Spagnolo	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Tedesco	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	☐	☐	☐	☐

11) Anno di corso preso la LUISS nell'anno accademico 1984-85:

1. I ☐
2. II ☐
3. III ☐
4. IV ☐

12) Se frequenta il quarto anno quale indirizzo ha scelto?

.....

13) Indichi l'anno ed il rispettivo livello del corso di Lingua inglese che sta frequentando presso la LUISS nel corrente anno accademico:

1. Corso propedeutico (da 01 a 11) ☐☐
2. Inglese I (da 01 a 12) ☐☐
3. Inglese II (da 01 a 12) ☐☐
4. Inglese III (da 01 a 13) ☐☐

14) Se la lingua inglese non fosse obbligatoria lei avrebbe scelto ugualmente di studiarla?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 16)

15) Indichi con i numeri da 1 a 4 quale è per lei l'ordine di importanza dei seguenti motivi per studiare la lingua inglese:

1. Per conoscere e capire un'altra cultura ☐
2. Per facilitare i rapporti interpersonali con persone di madre lingua inglese ☐
3. Per facilitare i rapporti interpersonali con persone di altra lingua ☐
4. Per utilizzarla nel campo di lavoro ☐

16) Ha mai visitato un paese di lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

17) Se no alla domanda precedente, pensa che nel futuro le interesserebbe visitare un paese di lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

18) Da quando si è iscritto alla LUISS ha frequentato altri corsi di lingua inglese al di fuori dell'università?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 21)

19) Se sì alla domanda precedente, dove e per quanto tempo?

	1 N. di anni	2 N. di mesi
1. In Italia	.....	.....
2. All'estero	.....	.....

20) Da quando è iscritto alla LUISS ha frequentato altri corsi universitari in campo economico-aziendale in lingua inglese?

	1 N. di anni	2 N. di mesi
1. In Italia	.....	.....
2. All'estero	.....	.....
3. Nessuno ☐		

21) Come valuta l'acquisizione delle seguenti abilità:

	1 poco importante	2 abbastanza importante	3 molto importante
1. Parlare	☐	☐	☐
2. Capire la lingua parlata	☐	☐	☐
3. Leggere	☐	☐	☐
4. Scrivere	☐	☐	☐

22) Nel suo caso personale la frequenza obbligatoria alla LUISS è stata utile per l'apprendimento dell'inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

23) Per seguire con profitto gli altri corsi di questa Facoltà ritiene che la conoscenza della lingua inglese sia:

1. Non necessaria ☐
2. Utile ☐
3. Indispensabile ☐
4. Non lo so ☐

24) Negli altri corsi da lei seguiti nell'anno accademico 1984-85 sono state richieste letture in lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 28)

25) Se sì alla domanda precedente, indichi in quali corsi le letture in lingua inglese sono state consigliate o incluse nel programma:

	1 consigliate	2 incluse nel programma
1.	☐	☐
2.	☐	☐
3.	☐	☐
4.	☐	☐

26) Indichi le letture in lingua inglese richieste per i corsi elencati sopra:

	1 consigliate	2 incluse nel pro-gramma	3 n. ap-pross.vo di pagine
Corso 1			
1. Lettura di libri di testo	☐	☐	.....
2. Lettura di libri o articoli di carattere scientifico	☐	☐	.....
3. Lettura di documenti ufficiali	☐	☐	.....
4. Lettura di materiali di uso professionale	☐	☐	.....
5. Altro	☐	☐	.....
Corso 2			
1. Lettura di libri di testo	☐	☐	.....
2. Lettura di libri o articoli di carattere scientifico	☐	☐	.....
3. Lettura di documenti ufficiali	☐	☐	.....
4. Lettura di materiali di uso professionale	☐	☐	.....
5. Altro	☐	☐	.....
Corso 3			
1. Lettura di libri di testo	☐	☐	.....
2. Lettura di libri o articoli di carattere scientifico	☐	☐	.....
3. Lettura di documenti ufficiali	☐	☐	.....
4. Lettura di materiali di uso professionale	☐	☐	.....
5. Altro	☐	☐	.....
Corso 4			
1. Lettura di libri di testo	☐	☐	.....
2. Lettura di libri o articoli di carattere scientifico	☐	☐	.....

	1 consigliate	2 incluse nel programma	3 n. appross.vo di pagine
3. Lettura di documenti ufficiali	☐	☐	.....
4. Lettura di materiali di uso professionale	☐	☐	.....
5. Altro	☐	☐	.....

27) Se ha avuto difficoltà con queste letture in lingua inglese, indichi in che misura hanno inciso nelle sue difficoltà i seguenti fattori:

	1 mai	2 raramente	3 qualche volta	4 spesso
1. Scarsa conoscenza delle strutture grammaticali inglesi e del vocabolario di base	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Scarsa capacità di leggere rapidamente in inglese	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Scarsa conoscenza della terminologia tecnica	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Scarsa conoscenza dell'argomento	☐	☐	☐	☐

28) Ritiene che per fare una buona tesi la conoscenza della lingua inglese sia:

1. Non necessaria ☐
2. Utile ☐
3. Indispensabile ☐
4. Non lo so ☐

29) Ha già iniziato a fare la tesi?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 32)

30) Per la sua tesi ha avuto l'esigenza di leggere libri o articoli in lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

31) Se sì alla domanda precedente, indichi il grado di difficoltà che ha incontrato:

1. Nessuna difficoltà
2. Qualche difficoltà
3. Molte difficoltà

32) Nella sua vita personale ha occasione di usare la lingua inglese per svolgere le seguenti atività:

	1 mai	2 qualche volta	3 spesso
1. Intrattenere rapporti personali o sociali	☐	☐	☐
2. Viaggiare in paesi di lingua inglese	☐	☐	☐
3. Tenere rapporti epistolari	☐	☐	☐
4. Leggere quotidiani o settimanali	☐	☐	☐
5. Leggere libri vari	☐	☐	☐
6. Ascoltare la radio o dischi o registrazioni di vario tipo	☐	☐	☐
7. Vedere films o spettacoli in lingua originale	☐	☐	☐

33) Personalmente le interesserebbe di più (indichi l'ordine di preferenza da 1 a 4):

1. Parlare meglio in inglese ☐
2. Capire meglio l'inglese parlato ☐
3. Leggere meglio in inglese ☐
4. Scrivere meglio in inglese ☐
5. Nessuno ☐

34) Ritiene che per una buona formazione professionale la capacità di svolgere le seguenti attività in lingua inglese sia:

	1 non necessaria	2 utile	3 indispensabile
1. Leggere libri di testo	☐	☐	☐
2. Leggere libri o articoli di carattere scientifico	☐	☐	☐

	1 non necessaria	2 utile	3 indispensabile
3. Leggere documenti ufficiali	☐	☐	☐
4. Leggere materiali di uso professionale	☐	☐	☐
5. Leggere quotidiani o riviste di carattere generale	☐	☐	☐
6. Tradurre in italiano materiali scientifici o professionali	☐	☐	☐
7. Tenere rapporti epistolari professionali	☐	☐	☐
8. Scrivere memoranda o brevi relazioni	☐	☐	☐
9. Comprendere una relazione orale	☐	☐	☐
10. Presentare una relazione orale	☐	☐	☐
11. Partecipare a discussioni professionali	☐	☐	☐
12. Intrattenere rapporti personali o sociali	☐	☐	☐
13. Altro	☐	☐	☐

35) Se ha indicato «utile» o «indispensabile» per qualcuno di queste capaità, quali tre ritiene più importanti in ordine di preferenza: (da 01 a 13)

1. ☐☐
2. ☐☐
3. ☐☐

36) Quali delle seguenti attività da svolgersi in classe le sembrano utili per l'apprendimento della lingua inglese?

	1 non necessaria	2 utile	3 indispensabile
1. Ascoltare brani registrati	☐	☐	☐
2. Fare esercizi di pronuncia	☐	☐	☐
3. Conversare o discutere su argomenti vari	☐	☐	☐

	1 non necessaria	2 utile	3 indispensabile
4. Presentare «oral reports»	☐	☐	☐
5. Fare esercizi orali su specifici punti grammaticali	☐	☐	☐
6. Fare esercizi scritti su specifici punti grammaticali	☐	☐	☐
7. Leggere testi di vario tipo	☐	☐	☐
8. Leggere testi di carattere economico-aziendale	☐	☐	☐
9. Analizzare la struttura ed il significato delle parole	☐	☐	☐
10. Fare esercizi di traduzione dall'inglese in italiano	☐	☐	☐
11. Fare esercizi di traduzione dall'italiano in inglese	☐	☐	☐
12. Scrivere lettere informali o brevi composizioni su temi vari	☐	☐	☐
13. Scrivere lettere commerciali	☐	☐	☐
14. Scrivere relazioni su temi di carattere economico-aziendale	☐	☐	☐
15. Scrivere relazioni basate su ricerche	☐	☐	☐
16. Fare «quizzes» e «tests» sul lavoro svolto in classe	☐	☐	☐
17. Altro	☐	☐	☐

37) Come giudica il suo livello di conoscenza della lingua inglese in ciascuna delle seguenti abilità:

	1 scarsa	2 discreta	3 buona	4 molto buona
1. Parlare	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Capire la lingua parlata	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Leggere	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Scrivere	☐	☐	☐	☐

38) Dopo la laurea ha intenzione di continuare gli studi universitari in Inghilterra o negli Sati Uniti?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

39) Dopo la laurea ha intenzione di lavorare o di risiedere in un paese di lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

QUESTIONARIO DOCENTI

Nome .....

Titolo del corso .....

1) Istituto di appartenenza:
   1. Studi economici ☐
   2. Studi aziendali ☐
   3. Studi giuridici ☐
   4. Studi storico-politici ☐
   5. Studi sociologici ☐

2) Caratteristiche del corso:
   1. Corso obbligatorio per tutti gli studenti ☐
   2. Corso base dei profili del 4° anno ☐
   3. Corso a scelta dei profili del 4° anno ☐

3) Nel Suo programma di esame ha incluso parti disponibili solo in lingua inglese?
   1. SI ☐
   2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 6)

4) Se sì alla domanda precedente, specificare, ove possibile, se si tratta di:
   1. Libri di testo ☐
   2. Libri o articoli di carattere scientifico ☐
   3 Documenti ufficiali ☐
   4. Materiale di uso professionale ☐
   5. Altro ..... ☐

5) Può indicare approssimativamente il numero totale di pagine?
   1. Da 01 a 10 ☐
   2. Da 10 a 25 ☐
   3. Da 25 a 50 ☐
   4. Da 50 a 100 ☐
   5. Oltre 100 ☐

6) Nelle letture consigliate per il corso, o per i seminari collegati allo stesso, ha incluso parti disponibili solo in lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 9)

7) Se sì alla domanda precedente, specificare, ove possibile, se si tratta di:

1. Libri di testo ☐
2. Libri o articoli di carattere scientifico ☐
3. Documenti ufficiali ☐
4. Materiali di uso professionale ☐
5. Altro ..... ☐

8) Può indicare approssimativamente il numero totale di pagine?

1. Da 01 a 10 ☐
2. Da 10 a 25 ☐
3. Da 25 a 50 ☐
4. Da 50 a 100 ☐
5. Oltre 100 ☐

9) Ritiene che per redigere una tesi nella Sua area di specializzazione la lettura di materiali in lingua inglese sia:

1. Non necessaria ☐
2. Utile ☐
3. Indispensabile ☐

(Se ha risposto negativamente ai punti 3), 6) e 9) passi direttamente al punto 13).

10) In base alla Sua esperienza, quanti studenti hanno avuto serie difficoltà nella lettura di materiali in lingua inglese?

1. Pochi ☐ 3. La maggior parte ☐
2. La metà ☐ 4. Non è emerso ☐ (saltare al punto 12)

11) Secondo Lei, quali sono le cause delle difficoltà incontrate dagli studenti nella lettura di testi in lingua inglese?

	1 in pochi casi	2 nella metà dei casi	3 nella maggior parte dei casi
1. Scarsa conoscenza delle strutture grammaticali inglesi e del vocabolario di base	☐	☐	☐
2. Scarsa capacità di leggere rapidamente in inglese	☐	☐	☐
3. Scarsa conoscenza della terminologia tecnica in inglese	☐	☐	☐
4. Scarsa conoscenza dell'argomento	☐	☐	☐

5. Non so ☐

12) Nella scelta dei materiali di lettura in lingua inglese considera, oltre al contenuto, qualcuno dei seguenti aspetti come fonte possibile di problemi per gli studenti?

1. Lunghezza ☐
2. Chiarezza espositiva ☐
3. Densità concettuale ☐
4. Nessuno ☐

13) Nell'ambito del Suo corso, ha avuto la possibilità di far ascoltare agli studenti speakers in lingua inglese?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

14) Ritiene che per una qualificazione professionale nella Sua area di specializzazione la capacità di svolgere le seguenti attività in lingua inglese sia:

	1 non necessaria	2 utile	3 indispensabile
1. Leggere libri di testo	☐	☐	☐
2. Leggere libri o articoli di carattere scientifico	☐	☐	☐

	1 non necessaria	2 utile	3 indispensabile
3. Leggere documenti ufficiali	☐	☐	☐
4. Leggere materiali di uso professionale	☐	☐	☐
5. Leggere quotidiani o riviste di carattere generale	☐	☐	☐
6. Tradurre in italiano materiali scientifici e professionali	☐	☐	☐
7. Tenere rapporti epistolari professionali	☐	☐	☐
8. Scrivere memoranda o brevi relazioni	☐	☐	☐
9. Comprendere una relazione orale	☐	☐	☐
10. Presentare una relazione scritta	☐	☐	☐
11. Partecipare a discussioni professionali	☐	☐	☐
12. Intrattenere rapporti personali e sociali	☐	☐	☐
13. Altro	☐	☐	☐

15) Se ha indicato «utile» o «indispensabile» per qualcuna di queste capacità, quali tre ritiene più importanti in ordine di preferenza: (da 01 a 13)

1. ☐☐
2. ☐☐
3. ☐☐

16) Nell'ambito del Suo lavoro accademico o professionale, impiega una lingua straniera?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐ (saltare al punto 19)

17) Se sì alla domanda precedente, indichi la lingua e la frequenza con la quale viene impiegata:.

	1 mai	2 a volte	3 spesso
1. Inglese	☐	☐	☐
2. Francese	☐	☐	☐
3. Tedesco	☐	☐	☐
4. Spagnolo	☐	☐	☐
5. Altro	☐	☐	☐

18) Se impiega la lingua inglese nell'ambito del Suo lavoro accademico o professionale:

	1 mai	2 a volte	3 spesso
1. Parla in inglese?	☐	☐	☐
2. Sente parlare in inglese?	☐	☐	☐
3. Legge in inglese?	☐	☐	☐
4. Scrive in inglese?	☐	☐	☐

19) Personalmente Le interesserebbe di più (indichi l'ordine di preferenza da 1 a 4):

1. Parlare meglio ininglese ☐
2. Capire megli l'inglese parlato ☐
3. Leggere meglio in inglese ☐
4. Scrivere meglio in inglese ☐
5. Nessuno ☐

20) Nel prossimo anno accademico intende richiedere ai Suoi studenti una maggiore utilizzazione della lingua inglese nell'ambito del Suo corso?

1. SI ☐
2. NO ☐

21) Se sì alla domanda precedente, in quale settore?

1. Lettura di libri di testo ☐
2. Lettura di libri o articoli di carattere scientifico ☐
3. Lettura di documenti ufficiali ☐
4. Lettura di materiali di uso professionale ☐
5. Ascolto di conferenze in inglese ☐
6. Altro ..... ☐

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Language Learners' Needs, Interests and Motivations - I Saperi degli studenti della Facoltà di Economia - Eurilink è la terza pubblicazione nata da un ampio programma di ricerca che si propone di sviluppare elaborazione teorica ed esperienza didattica nello studio del processo d'apprendimento-insegnamento linguistico. In particolare, i singoli contributi intendono analizzare le caratteristiche dell'interazione, dello sviluppo cognitivo e comunicativo dei discenti in ambiente misto, per elaborare riflessioni utili a definire un adeguato approccio metodologico e facilitare le operazioni di apprendimento-insegnamento.

Questo volume presenta i risultati di un'indagine sui bisogni linguistici degli studenti della Facoltà di Economia e commercio della LUISS. Tali bisogni, sia accademici che professionali, sono stati identificati attraverso la somministrazione di questionari a studenti e docenti della facoltà. Allargandosi ad esaminare anche gli interessi, le aspettative, le preferenze e le motivazioni degli studenti nell'apprendimento della lingua inglese, l'indagine si colloca nella tradizione progettuale del Consiglio d'Europa e rispecchia l'attuale tendenza a valorizzare il ruolo attivo dei discenti nel processo d'apprendimento linguistico.

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